DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 013 EC 302 582

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TITLE	Helping Each Other Help Others: Principles and Practices of Collaboration. ARCH Factsheet Number 25.
INSTITUTION	ARCH National Resource Center for Crisis Nurseries and Respite Care Services, Chapel Hill, NC.; North Carolina State Dept. of Human Resources, Raleigh. Div. of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services.
SPONS AGENCY	Children's Bureau (DHHS/OHS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Jul 93
CONTRACT	90-CN-0121
NOTE	5p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Agency Cooperation; *Community Programs; *Cooperation; Cooperative Programs; *Disabilities; Models; Participative Decision Making; Program Development; *Respite Care
IDENTIFIERS	*Crisis Child Care

ABSTRACT

This fact sheet focuses on principles and practices of collaboration, especially between community crisis nursery and respite care services for families of children with special needs. First, the paper distinguishes among various ways to share resources, including networking, coordination, cooperation, and then collaboration, which is seen as encompassing the other concepts and resulting in mutual benefit for the participating organizations. Examples of collaboration follow, such as using the agency that licenses foster homes to license family care crisis nursery or respite care homes. Next, two collaborative models are explained, first, the collaborative betterment model which begins outside of the community by agencies or organizations and is brought into the community; and second, the collaborative empowerment model which begins within the community and is brought to agencies and organizations. The collaborative empowerment model is seen as more likely to effect long term change and community ownership. Key principles of this model are listed, followed by guidelines for an effective collaboration process. (DB)

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ED 364 013

ARCH Factsheet Number 25, July, 1993

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Helping Each Other Help Others

Principles and Practices of Collaboration

Background

Crisis nursery and respite care services, like many other services which grow out of community need, are often developed through the focused and creative work of committed groups of agencies and individuals. These groups represent collaborative efforts to solve problems and create more effective services for families.

The current concern about ongoing funding for crisis nursery and respite care programs makes collaboration a more attractive option. As financial resources for community needs become more scarce, there is increasing pressure on organizations to find common goals. Organizations working together can provide access to more services and support, and present a strong, united picture of their efforts to potential funders.

Ways to Share Resources

Not all shared resource efforts begin at the point of collaboration. Organizations have a variety of options for working with others with common interests.

***Networking** is exchanging* information for mutual benefit. This is the most informal of the four options. An example of networking is when organizations, programs, or individuals who have an interest in child abuse prevention agree to meet monthly to share ideas and concerns.

***Coordination** is exchanging* information *and altering* activities for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose. Coordination requires more organizational involvement than networking and can be an important strategy for change. It is most useful when all parties affected by proposed changes share in decisions about the possible consequences of the changes. An example of coordination is when agencies work together to coordinate the provision of services for families and to schedule transportation, thereby eliminating unnecessary and duplicative paperwork and making it easier for parents to arrange schedules to obtain needed services for their children.

***Cooperation** is exchanging* information, *altering* activities, *and sharing* resources, for mutual benefit, and to achieve a common purpose. Shared resources may include staff, work space, training, information, funding, and, in some cases, legal arrangements. Cooperation is used when the crisis nursery program and the local social service agency use the same service coordinator to assist families in making appointments for case management services, medical assistance, etc.

***Collaboration** is exchanging* information, *altering* activities, *sharing* resources, *and enhancing* the capacity of another organization, for mutual benefit, and to achieve a common purpose. Members of a collaborative effort view each other as partners and are willing to share risks, resources, responsibilities, and rewards. A *multisector collaboration* is an alliance of public, private, and nonprofit organizations. Collaboration is illustrated by public and private agencies in a community working together toward the creation of a crisis nursery. All available resources, including community contacts and funding, are fully shared.

Examples of Shared Resources

Because collaboration can be complex and time-consuming, it should be chosen after careful consideration, when it is determined that the first three approaches described in the previous section will not achieve the desired goals.

Collaborative partners stand with, work with, and support each other when risks must be taken, and share responsibilities for large and small tasks that must be accomplished.

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In sharing resources, it is important to acknowledge that each partner can and should make contributions, and to define "resources" broadly. For example, credibility with, and access to, neighborhood residents are as important as financial contributions, and people who understand a community issue from their personal experience are as valuable as others with highly technical research skills. The following examples describe some of the ways resources are commonly shared:

- using the experience of parents or other consumers to plan the program of the crisis nursery or respite care program;
- using medical staff from public health agencies or local hospitals to provide medical care to children;
- using a community or county agency that licenses foster homes to license family care crisis nursery or respite care homes;
- using identifiable members of a neighborhood to do community canvassing for a needs assessment;
- using staff from other community agencies to train respite care or crisis nursery staff; and
- using low-interest housing renovation funds to make crisis nurseries or respite care centers accessible.

In sharing rewards, no single organization takes credit for the accomplishments. Publicity about the collaboration acknowledges all partners. Sharing rewards can also mean celebrating the achievement of particular goals. Shared celebrations can have very positive benefits for all partners and can make the longer-term viability of the collaboration much stronger.

In a multisector collaboration, all partners must make a good-faith effort to address fundamental issues in a constructive manner, resolving their differences in viewpoint, power, and trust. Particularly important is the way people view and treat each other – sharing their concerns in ways that allow others to respond without defensiveness; refraining from making key decisions privately among a few members; and letting other members know their reasons if they leave the process, rather than simply withdrawing.

Two Basic Types of Collaboration

Two basic models of designing and implementing multisector collaboration can be called "collaborative betterment" and "collaborative empowerment." Each has particular effects on community ownership, self-determination, and the long-term sustainability of the collaboration effort.

Collaborative betterment begins outside the grassroots community, within public, private, or nonprofit organizations, and is brought into the community. Community involvement is invited at certain points in a process designed and controlled by the organizations which started the effort. This strategy can produce policy changes and improvements in program services and delivery, but will not result in a long-term increase in community ownership or control.

Key Principles of the Collaborative Betterment Model

- Staff members are responsible to the organizations for whom they work. They may seek advice from target communities, but are not directly accountable to them.
- Plans, usually designed with some direct community involvement, are based on the ideas of organizations, professionals and experts.
- Problem identification and analysis is initiated by organizations, which can be large and influential and bring their own assumptions and value systems to the process.
- Governance and administration are controlled by organizations, with limited community representation in advisory roles.
- Implementation requires community representation and acceptance, but decision-making and funding remain with the organizations.
- Although advice from the community is considered, the decision to end a collaboration is made by the organizations that initiated it.

Collaborative empowerment begins within the community and is brought to public, private, or nonprofit organizations. The community sets its own priorities and controls resources allocated to the collaboration. This increases community self-determination. A collaborative empowerment strategy includes two basic activities:

(1) organizing a community in support of a collaborative purpose determined by the community, such as the need to create crisis care services for children and families, and

(2) facilitating a process for integrating outside organizations in support of this community purpose. For example, agencies which address issues of child welfare, crisis intervention, family health, and financial assistance might all be invited into the process by the community.

The empowerment approach can produce policy changes and improve program services and delivery, and it is also more likely to produce long-term community ownership and self-determination.

Key Principles of the Collaborative Empowerment Model

- The process of collaboration is initiated in a community setting and assisted by the community. Early discussions focus on assumptions and values.
- All resource contributions from participants are equally valued. The resource may be a member's knowledge of a community, an organization's contribution of funding, or myriad other items and experiences. The diversity inherent in a multicultural collaborative effort is another highly valued resource.
- Both a needs assessment analysis and everyday examples from community residents are used to identify community problems and set priorities for collaboration activities.
- The governance and administrative structure may include a policy board, an executive committee, action groups for implementing plans (interagency councils), and staff agreeable to the community. Decision-making power is equally shared by the community and outside organizations. Administration/management goals and community participation goals are balanced.
- Goals can be implemented if plans are supported by community residents as well as by representatives from the general public, and from private and nonprofit organizations.
- Public assessment and evaluation are built into the process and give community-based organizations opportunities to monitor the progress of the collaborative effort.
- Community priorities are reflected by the purpose of the effort, and representatives of community-based organizations identify strategic public, private, and nonprofit organizations with which to work.
- Community-based efforts can be designed to empower communities while addressing specific needs, like affordable housing, if they begin in the community and are guided by community members who will share power with the organizations.
- To continue efforts after the collaborative effort ends, it is essential that resources, including funding, be community controlled.

The empowerment approach is gaining acceptance because

(1) community-based organizations taking the initiative and shaping agendas in collaborative efforts can produce outstanding results, and
(2) competing, increasing demands on the time and resources of organizations make it more difficult for them to design, initiate, and implement collaborative efforts.

Betterment and empowerment collaborative processes are not mutually exclusive in practice. These pure models should be seen as guides to collaboration, and as a way to understand some general characteristics of multisector collaboration.

Elements of an Effective Collaboration Process

Individual organizations need to consider the following:

- Participants who represent organizations are more effective than those representing only themselves, because they bring the resources of their organizations with them.
- Smooth transitions are important. When organizations replace their representatives, they should provide as much advance notice as possible and fully prepare their new representatives for the responsibilities they will undertake.
- Time constraints on members, who tend to add on their collaborative commitments without giving up other responsibilities, can be a major barrier to the collaborative process. This should be remembered when planning collaborative action.
- Organizations participating in collaborative efforts should operate with collaborative and supportive policies within their own organizations, and individual members should practice participatory, democratic processes.

Individual members of the collaborative effort need to consider these factors:

- The importance of trust should be reinforced. Sharing information and responsibility should be the core of all problem-identification and problem-solving activities.
- Communication *within* participating organizations is as important as communication *among* participating organizations. Individual members have a responsibility to coordinate their participation with others in their own group so their contributions are effective and coherent.
- Consistent meeting attendance and attention to "homework" between meetings is essential, because there is no day-to-day organization to maintain continuity.
- Common courtesy is one of the most essential characteristics of collaboration. This includes returning phone calls, acknowledging written

correspondence, listening to people, and treating people with respect.

- Communication among members should be clear so everyone knows what is happening and can explain the process to others outside the collaboration process.

The following general considerations apply to efforts toward creating a successful collaboration:

- Collaboration requires a commitment by all participants to work together by sharing information, resources, power, and visions for a common good.
- Multisector collaboration is difficult and complex, requiring time and patience.
- To be effective, collaboration often requires trained, professional facilitators in addition to regular staff. Facilitators, either occasional or long-term, can serve as impartial observers, making recommendations for improving collaborative practices.
- Public and private funding sources often fail to understand the time required to create and sustain collaborative efforts and set application deadlines that do not provide sufficient planning time. Collaborating organizations will need to decide how to continue their process while responding to the everyday needs for funding.
- Collaboration requires a common vision and a common language; then the direction and possible outcomes can be seen from the start, and specialized terminology from different sectors will not hamper the members' ability to understand each other.
- Adequate staff, whether voluntary or paid, is essential. Collaboration involves numerous tasks that cannot be left to chance. At the same time, the staff must contribute their expertise without taking control of the process.
- Collaborative efforts should encourage communication between diverse constituencies and participation by those normally left out of traditional processes, especially if community-based collaboration is to address potential issues of class, race, gender, and other forms of discrimination.
- A clear governing structure with lines of accountability is essential to ensure that the complex collaborative process does not end in confusion.

Conclusion

Working with a collaborative plan toward the development of new services to meet the needs of families can be an exciting and creative process. Organizations and individuals should understand their needs with regard to entering into such a process and be prepared to think in new ways toward solutions. A collaboration can create an atmosphere for stronger community ownership of a project, thus ensuring its long-term success and viability.

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Service Integration: an Annotated Bibliography, Center For Children In Poverty, Columbia University, New York, NY.

Together We Can: a Guide for Crafting a Prefamily System of Education and Human Services, the U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, D.C.

Resources

Directory of Consultants Helping Communities Collaborate and Consumer's Guide, Program for Community Problem Solving, 915 15th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 202-783-2961.

Family Resource Coalition, 200 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1520, Chicago, IL 60604, 312-341-9361.

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This fact sheet was produced by the ARCH National Resource Center for Crisis Nurseries and Respite Care Services funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau—Cooperative Agreement No. 90-CN-0121 under contract with the North Carolina Department of Human Resources, Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/ Substance Abuse Services, Child and Family Services Branch of Mental Health Services, Raleigh, North Carolina. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funders, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This information is in the public domain. Readers are encouraged to copy and share it, but please credit the ARCH National Resource Center.